



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

The power of the press

One of the interesting stories resulting from the war in Iraq will be the analysis of the media's role in modern-day warfare. With reporters embedded in what seemed like every unit bearing down on Baghdad, U.S. viewers could watch the war unfold before their very eyes. At home, reporters presented glimpses of the public's reactions to the war.

Was the coverage fair? Was it accurate? Did reporters get too involved? Were they unbiased and objective? Did they allow themselves to be led astray? Did they dig deep enough? Did they go too far? Just how free is the "free press," and is that a good thing?

Under scrutiny

The power of the press is undeniable. It can educate. It can entertain. It can encourage. It can cause panic. It can engross a nation. It can change the world.

As with any influence, it can be used responsibly, for the good of its audience. Or, it can be wielded carelessly, irresponsibly or to intentionally mislead.

I'd contend most journalists enter the workforce because they want to make the world a little better place. And they strive day by day to responsibly balance speed, accuracy and quality of reporting.

I don't pretend to deal day-to-day with issues of the magnitude that the reporters of the war evaluated. But, just as waitresses are said to be most critical of other waitresses, I think journalists are harshest on each other.

Already under analysis are the tag lines each news agency chose for its war coverage: "War in Iraq," "War with Iraq," "America at War," "Target: Iraq." Do these themes

themselves reveal biases inappropriate for media that are supposed to be unbiased and objective? Is it OK for American media to have a bias favoring U.S. military operations?

During interviews and press briefings, reporters seemed to push the envelope, asking questions that bordered on revealing information that would assist the former leaders of Iraq. Did they endanger the U.S. position? Did they endanger the troops? Or were they being used to reveal information our military wanted the other side to know?

For the most part, I thought the embedded reporters did an extremely good job of reporting what they could and explaining what they couldn't report and why. It was the analysis that took place back in the studios to fill air time that separated the news agencies.

Personal preference

It didn't take long for me to narrow my attention to CNN's Aaron Brown and

Christiane Amanpour. As an anchor, Brown conducted some of the same types of interviews as other news anchors, but my perception was that he made sure each view was put into context and biases revealed. At times it seemed he was going off script to provide "cautions" concerning information that had just come to light. Amanpour simply seemed to reveal more accurate facts with less commentary than other onsite reporters.

But those are my personal preferences. I'm sure you developed your own, and I'm sure the networks are trying to sort out how many of us they hooked, who they hooked and why.

Covering agriculture

While the war put in the spotlight the competency of the American media, the ag press deals with the same issues of bias, accuracy and full disclosure.

As a member of the ag media, I'm proud to be part of a professional fraternity that avoids sensationalism and holds fast to a code of ethics.

I would contend that agriculturists are by nature more analytical than the average reader or listener. We intend for the *Angus Journal* to fill the role of being the most informative beef publication in the industry.

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